

BOOKS AND AUTHORS REVIEWS AND COMMENT

LITERARY CRITICISM AND BOOK NEWS

Dante, His Country and His Time—The Swiss System of Military Preparedness—Daniel Defoe—Vachel Lindsay

THE FLORENTINE

DANTE. By C. H. Grandgent. I. H. D. Professor of Romance Languages, Harvard University. 12mo. Pp. 215. \$1.40 net.

Homer, Shakespeare, Dante—these three—and there is no fourth. Such is the estimate of many, and with it we shall not quarrel. Other great poets have been, in various lands, there are unending rivalries for precedence. But these three stand apart, supreme, in a class of their own.

Such is Dr. Grandgent's estimate; to which he adds that: that in at least one important respect Dante was the greatest of the three. And with that estimate, too, we shall not quarrel. Especially after reading the scholarly and lucid volume in which the author seeks to prove his point.

The respect in which Dante is held to have surpassed his two gigantic comrades in the bardic trinity, and therefore all other poets of the world, is as an exponent of—we might add, and as a factor in—the spirit, the affairs, the very life of his age and land. Homer gives us an unrivaled pageant of gods and men, the thunder of Olympus and the long resounding swell of the sea. Shakespeare gives us the human soul, analyzed in all its myriad phases of joy and woe, of virtue and of sin. Dante gives us the social life of his time, in church and state, in camp and court, in science and in art; and of all the complex and mighty drama of the most interesting country in one of the most interesting ages of the world he would say: "All of these things I saw, and a great part of them I was."

Of Homer's relations to the affairs of his time we know not; whether he was a hero or a hermit. Of Shakespeare we know that he was a detached looker-on and not a participant in public affairs; besides which, he wrote chiefly of affairs in which he could not have participated; they were in other lands and ages, though he made them all of his own land and age—Achilles and Antony as much English heroes as Henry V. But Dante Alighieri was a man of practical affairs; a politician, an administrator, a soldier, a diplomat, as well as a scholar and scientist; and he was all these things at a time when Church and State, religion and science, literature and society were all inextricably commingled as never before or since in the history of the world, in that obscure alembic which men call the Dark Ages. The are which produced the cathedrals and the saints was indeed "a grand and awful time."

It is to this phase of Dante, or rather to the age of Dante and his place in it as a factor and as its immortal exponent, that Dr. Grandgent chiefly addresses himself. And this is well, because that is, after all, Dante's chief significance to the world. We have had many books about him, and a number

of them have appeared in the last few months that suggest something like a Dantean renaissance, or the development of a Dante cult—from which angels and ministers of grace, defend us! The world does not know nearly enough about Dante, and it will never know too much about him; but it should never make him a fad. Most of these recent books have been of real merit. But not one of them, so far as we have observed, has been devoted so fully and so effectively as this to the explication of this supreme characteristic of the mighty Florentine.

So we have chapters on society and politics, on church and state, on medieval song, with numerous specimens from many singers, on didactic literature, on theology, on man and his world, on man and his works, on medieval learning, on the medieval temper, as well as on the "Divina Commedia." Most of these are illustrated with copious quotations from the various translators—Rossetti, Cary, Plimpton, Longfellow—but chiefly the work of Dr. Grandgent himself, of which we are, indeed, glad. For thus is revealed not only a new but a decidedly interesting translator. Indeed,

partly as an illustration of Dante's incomparable analysis and exposition of the very heart of his own land and age, and partly as an example of the Byronic spirit which now and then unconsciously controls his present translator. It is from "Il Purgatorio," VI, just after the meeting of Virgil and Sordello:

Ah! servile Italy, a vessel thou Unguided in the storm, a home of tears, Once queen of provinces, a brothel now! That noble soul so lightning swift To bid his townsman welcome over there, When first his city's dulcet name he hears; And yet the living tenants cannot bear To hide in peace, and mate devoured mate— Those cities whose walls and ditches share, Seek, wretched one, about thy sea-girt state, Survey thy shores, then cast thine eyes within, And name a town where love hath banished hate.

It is in discussing the "Medieval Temper" that Dr. Grandgent gives perhaps his best characterization of once of Dante and of the spirit of his age. Submissiveness to authority was one of the salient features of the medieval spirit. In writing poems or in building cathedrals the aim of the artist was to produce a perfect work and not to exploit his own name or his own peculiarities. He strove "to express concepts familiar to all in a medium congenial to all." But now and then, rarely but notably, an author in spite of himself had to reveal himself. He could not hold his originality in check. "Such was Dante," he was taller than the rest, he followed and could not hide behind it. In his negation of progress, in his worship of authority, he was unreservedly a citizen of his own commonwealth; but his towering self was beyond the grasp of his contemporaries, and his power, his spiritual experiences, to be sure, he laid bare for the benefit of his fellow men; but of his material life he told next to nothing.

Dr. Grandgent has produced this volume, of which perhaps the best estimate may be epitomized in the single phrase that it is worthy of its august theme.

LITTLE THEATRES
"Little Theatres in the United States" is the subject of a new book upon which Constance D'Arcy Mackay is busily engaged. It will give a detailed account of the rise of the Little Theatre in the United States, with a sketch of its European ancestry. There are between thirty-five and forty Little Theatres in this country to-day. A description of each of them will be included, together with an account of its history, policy, achievements and repertoire, and its scenic, lighting and decorative effects and resources. The book will be published by the Little Theatre Guild, 100 West 42nd Street, New York City. The price is \$1.00 net. Post. Extra. All bookstores.

BECAUSE I AM A GERMAN
By Hermann Fernau
This is the finest piece of pure patriotism which the war has yet produced. Daring everything, even hatred of his own people, the author flouts the "My-country-right-or-wrong" brand of patriotic appeal, and fearlessly calls to his countrymen in the name of the Right and of the Right only. Three weeks after publication in Germany every copy of the work was confiscated by the police and its sale forbidden under the heaviest penalties.

German military control followed "Because I Am a German" to the United States with such efficiency that the leading German papers in this country have refused to insert an advertisement of the book in their columns.

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CITIZEN SOLDIERS

The Example of Switzerland in Defensive Preparedness

RIGHT AND DUTY OF CITIZEN SOLDIER. National Guard and Swiss Army. By Frederick A. Knecht. Formerly an officer of the Swiss Army. Illustrated by J. H. Stoddard & Co.

"Two voices are there." One is, that Switzerland, with its universal military service, presents the world's best model of democracy armed like a strong man in defence of his own house, which if we do not emulate, we shall not know but more shrill, admonishes us that our national salvation depends upon our scrupulously shunning the wicked militarism of the land of Tell and Winkelried. The other, less numerous but no less earnest, shall not make his choice; we, at least, doing so with little hesitation. But to those who choose the one or the other, the same and informing voice of this little volume comes with the authority of facts.

The author is an enthusiastic admirer of his native land, which he served with distinction in both college and camp; though he has now for many years been an American citizen and a public servant. He is also a strong believer in military preparedness for this country, as nearly as may be possible according to the democratic model of Switzerland; which, by the way, approximates closely to the design of the founders of this Republic as expressed in the Constitution and early legislation. But he is by no means a mere special pleader. His book is not a propaganda. It is a handbook of information, historical, descriptive and legal.

Beginning with the Interregnum of the Empire, in the thirteenth century, the author gives a strikingly comprehensive history of Swiss national development down to the present day; a narrative which is essential to a just understanding of the temper and ideals of the Swiss people and of the organization of their confederated cantons. "All for each, and each for all," is the prescription of their ancient Bond. But we must not fall into the error of imagining that the Swiss are a people of untroubled ease. They are a people of the relations of the cantons among themselves. It does indeed apply to them; but it has long had, with increasing intensity and significance, another far more fundamental and far more comprehensive meaning. That is its application to the relationships between the individual and the nation. All for each, the whole Swiss nation for each individual, and each for the whole nation—in war as well as in peace.

Mr. Knecht gives us a notably clear and comprehensible account of the manner in which the entire nation is thus organized, trained and equipped for national defence. Obviously, the system has not interfered with the spiritual and intellectual development of Switzerland, and has been honorably noted. Neither has it been an incubus upon industry and thrift, qualities which the Swiss have indeed developed so highly as at times to their detriment. No visitor to the "Helvetia" ground of Europe is ever oppressed with a sense of pervasive militarism. The alpenstock and the shepherd's pipe are seen a hundred times oftener than the rifle and the sword. It is not a fact of imagination, to say, as does our author, that when the storm broke in Europe in August, 1914, and none could tell which way it might roll, within forty-eight hours after the order of mobilization the Swiss army of 425,000 was drawn up to a man, along the German, French, Austrian and Italian frontiers. 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